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WASHINGTON
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Tips For Presidents

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The Congressional committees investigating the Iran-contra affair are collecting some useful tips for the next President of the United States. Among them are the following:

- Good friends usually make bad Attorneys General.
- Clip the wings of the National Security Council.
- Ditto the Central Intelligence Agency.
- Beware of former campaign managers, and reorganize your cabinet to serve as your principal source of advice.
- In a more frivolous vein, cut off all air-conditioning in Washington during July and August and give everybody a much-needed rest.

In his testimony before the committees, Ed Meese did nothing to challenge the rule that good friends make bad Attorneys General.

All his political life, in Sacramento as well as Washington, his main loyalty has been to Ronald Reagan rather than to the law. Nothing in his legal training justified his appointment as the principal law official of the land, and his testimony this week dramatized the point.

He was concerned primarily not with the control of Colonel North or Admiral Poindexter, but with damage control. His testimony was not only unpersuasive but at times ungrammatical, and he has a convenient memory.

Some Presidents have had good friends who also presided over the Department of Justice with distinction. President Eisenhower's Attorney General Herbert Brownell, for example, and President Carter's Griffin Bell.

Mr. Bell, however, remarked this week that President Reagan's mistake was in moving Mr. Meese from the White House, where he was dealing primarily with political questions, into the Justice Department, where he kept thinking in political rather than legal terms.

Winning Presidents, not unnaturally, want to reward the men who have run their successful campaigns, but this has not always been a good idea.

President Nixon, for example, chose his law partner and campaign manager, John Mitchell, as Attorney General and drowned at Watergate.

Bill Casey ran Ronald Reagan's successful campaign, and wanted to be Secretary of State. Mr. Reagan turned him down but said he could have any other job he wanted. Fortunately he didn't choose Justice but took the C.I.A., and sometimes operated there as if he had the post he really preferred.

It was George Shultz who suggested the other day that the time had come to cut the N.S.C. down to size. It is too big and too involved in running policy instead of gathering intelligence, he said, and seems to be accountable to nobody.

Maybe the main observation to come out of these hearings is that Presidents stumble into trouble by making thoughtless appointments and then relying on these appointees for critical policy advice, and giving them authority they have no right to exercise.

Messrs. Poindexter, McFarlane, Casey and Meese are cases in point. They didn't mean to preside over this crisis; most of the time they didn't mean anything except to help the President by denying him and Congress the facts they needed for accountable decisions. Is there a better way? During the critical transition period when President Reagan was picking a cabinet and deciding how to organize his Administration, Caspar Weinberger made a suggestion. It was based on the model of Winston Churchill's small War Cabinet.

Mr. Weinberger thought the President should establish offices for the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and Attorney General in the Executive Office Building across the street from the Oval Office, and meet with them, along with the White House chief of staff, every morning to consider the major problems for decision.

Mr. Shultz had made a similar proposal years ago when he was Treasury Secretary, but the idea was rejected, partly because it might irritate the other members of the cabinet and the heads of the N.S.C. and the C.I.A.

In the end, of course, it all comes down to the use of the President's appointive power. Nobody worries, for example, about Judge Webster now directing the C.I.A., or Howard Baker, the White House chief of staff, or Frank Carlucci at the N.S.C. But Mr. Meese at Justice is still a problem.

When President Ford interviewed Edward H. Levy of the University of Chicago for the post of Attorney General, he asked him what the Department of Justice needed most.

"It needs a soul," Mr. Levy replied. He got the job and ran it very well.

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